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ABSTRACT

Journal writing--an expressive prose that verbalizes the writer's consciousness--helps the student by fostering personal growth, reducing writing apprehension, strengthening prewriting in students' composing processes, and enhancing the development of writing abilities. Journals are places for students to write what they will, for teachers to accept as valuable what students say because they say it, and for teachers not to evaluate what students write. The use of the journal may cause teachers to hesitate because they may believe that there is too much variety in the amount, kinds, and quality of writing done in journals; that students write "garbage"; that there is too much intimacy in the journals; or that journals are hard to grade. Students resist journals in two ways: they have a hard time defining their roles as writers in a journal or they see journal writing as trivial. The journal can become the crossing point of communication between student and teacher. The journal holds whatever a student wants to write and it also holds a teacher's honest questions and supportive comments. (HOD)

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The Journal Keeps the Person in the Process

Shelley C. Reece

A skeptical reader might approach this essay with the idea that there isn't much to say. Such a thesis as "the journal keeps the person in the process" hardly needs a defense, for composition teachers are trying to find ways daily "to get students involved in writing." In the process. Is there any kind of writing, journal or otherwise, that will push the person out of the process?

Yes, there is. Martin Joos describes it this way:

> The formal style is strictly determined by the absence of participation. This absence infects the speaker also. He may speak as if he were not present, avoiding such allusions to his own existence as 'I,' 'me,' 'mine,' with the possible exception of 'one'--a formal code-label--or 'myself' in desperate situations. The speaker protects both the text and himself from involvement; presumably he will be absent if the roof collapses.[1]

Joos calls 'detachment'--that is, the protection of text and self from involvement--a defining feature of formal style. In this kind of writing, the person is refined out of existence, like the artist in James Joyce's A Portrait. Joos also hints at the unhealthy nature of such an "absence": it "infects" the speaker.

This kind of exclusion is closer to my experience than quotations from Joos and Joyce. Look at these three examples from my teaching of writing. In winter term, 1980, a composition student said, "One of my teachers taught me never to begin a sentence with 'because.' I've been so confused." A year or two ago, a woman in one of my writing classes, composing an essay

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about something she did, referred to herself consistently throughout t- paper not as 'I' or 'she,' but as 'he.' And, finally, in a Portland high school (the one with the highest percentage of college prep students in the city), the head of the English Department told me, "We have to prepare our students to write in the third person, past tense, for college." Each instance here tells me something: if I am a student, I am supposed to disregard my experience when I am given a prescription about language, and I am supposed to write about my experience as if it were someone else's; if I am a teacher, I am supposed to teach my students an impersonal mode of writing to separate their experience from their uses of language.

It appears that a student's role is to write impersonally, even when it confuses the student; a teacher's role is to teach that use of impersonality in writing. So students can learn, and can be taught, to write in exclusive ways, ways that keep them out of the process.

Although I for one am not at my best in a formal mode, I don't deny the need for that way of writing. It is the style of research papers, government reports, position papers, grant proposals, and a God's plenty more. It is, furthermore, the kind of writing which composition teachers most often teach in college, the style of the expository essay, the one written in "school English."[2] Yet, unless something balances the detachment of the person from the process in that kind of writing, students may learn to disregard their own experience, including their own personal and local resources of language, with the result that they cover and label "contaminated" the well from which they draw their own fluid expressions, and their writing goes bone dry. I have found that journal writing helps students uncover that well, and that their own personal juices, their local idioms, nourish their writing in other kinds of prose.

Journal writing--that is, expressive prose that verbalizes the writer's consciousness[3]--is more than a useful adjunct to other kinds of prose in a composition course (or a literature, art, or history course). It is basic--a foundation on which other kinds of writing arise, a center around which other kinds of writing grow. I see four ways to justify the use of journals, each way helping writers to stay engaged with their work: 1) to foster personal growth; 2) to reduce writing apprehension and anxiety; 3) to strengthen pre-writing in students' composing processes; and 4) to enhance the development of writing abilities. Further, I identify each justification with one or two people whose ideas get to the central reasons for using journals.

First, Carl Rogers and Ira Progoff, both trained as psychotherapists, believe that internal and external communication fosters personal growth. Rogers writes that "the whole task of psychotherapy is the task of dealing with a failure in communication"[4]; good internal communication consists in removing blocks between the conscious and unconscious parts of a person, and then that person "can communicate more freely and effectively with others."[5] Rogers also believes that feeling threatened can inhibit communication; of course, if students feel highly threatened when required to write, they will probably find ways to avoid that need or deny it altogether. However, if a teacher is willing to provide an atmosphere that fosters constructive creativity, then those students can grow personally, whether such growth means that they realize they need to write or that they can grow through writing. According to Rogers, the conditions of "psychological safety" and "psychological freedom" are necessary for such growth. Three related processes can help provide that safety: "accepting the individual as of

unconditional worth"; "providing a climate in which external evaluation is absent"; and "understanding empathetically." To provide psychological freedom, a person needs to be given the freedom "to think, to feel, to be, whatever is most inward."[6]

In this context, we might think of journals as places for students to write what they will, for teachers to accept as valuable what students say because they say it, and for teachers not to evaluate--that is, specifically edit, correct, and grade what students write.

Ira Progoff shares some of Rogers' views. He, too, believes for instance that language is directly related to therapeutic health and growth, but he goes further than Rogers in putting this idea into action about writing. Working out of Dialogue House in New York City, Progoff travels the United States conducting "intensive journal workshops," sessions which resemble retreats in format. He encourages people to examine their lives reflectively through intensive journals, an elaborately sequenced process that includes the writing of a "period log," the keeping of a daily log, the discovery of "steppingstones" in one's own life, the recording of dream images, and dialogues with works, the body, events, and society. He wants people to use these kinds of writing to position themselves in the movement of their lives, between the experiences of the past and the possibilities of the future,[7] in order to make creative decisions about the directions of their lives. In Progoff's intensive journal work, people go through carefully organized (not "structured") sequences of writings to prepare themselves to answer the question "where am I in the movement of my life?"[8] That question seems especially appropriate for people eighteen to twenty-two years old, or even older. Me, for instance.

In 1979-80, a small group of students worked with me in an intensive journal workshop. They ranged in age from about twenty to thirty-five years old, and none of them was just beginning college. In addition, no one had attended a Progoff-led workshop before. We met for two hours a week during two ten-week terms; our only activities were to read and discuss Progoff, to write in the journal, and to read, if we chose, some of what we had written. In one term, I wrote some eighty pages of guided prose, probably somewhat below the average for the group. Using some of the Progoff suggestions, partly meditative, I remembered colors, smells, sounds--whole scenes--that must have been laid away, hidden, or buried in my memory. While I have kept a journal for the past five years, I have never before been so prolific at it. During part of the Progoff workshop, I generated as many as five written pages in a half hour, a remarkable effort for me.

A second justification for journal writing appears in the work of John Daly on "writing apprehension" and Lynn and Martin Bloom on "writing anxiety." Daly has devised a way to identify people with high apprehension about writing and, furthermore, he has related other characteristic behavior to high apprehensive writers. According to Daly, a "high apprehensive" writes less with more mechanical errors; is inclined to miss class on the day writing is due; is less likely to turn in a paper; is likely to avoid registering for a class seen as involving writing; and is likely to choose a career that does not require much writing, if any.[9]

Daly suggests that high apprehension arises from a series of aversive, punishment-like experiences with writing. "Too often," Daly writes, "I think composition programs are based on a punishment model. High apprehension means an expectation of punishment which reduces the level of skill acquisition

which in turn leads to justified epxectations of further punishment or non-reward."[10] He suggests that a reduction in apprehension would only come from a situation where people would not see writing as punishment ("Anything you say will be used against you.").

The work of the Blooms complements that of Daly in some ways. For instance, they agree that high apprehension needs to be reduced significantly for a person to write functionally. Yet Martin Bloom works somewhat differently from Daly. Bloom, a social psychologist, calls writing anxiety 'normal,' in the sense that people who experience it can conduct the rest of their lives in reasonable ways, though it may also "stand in a person's way to accomplishing reasonable goals."[11] It is, therefore, "worth recognizing and overcoming." Observing more specifically than Daly about teachers of writing, Bloom says that they "as a group do not pay as much formal attention to the positive forces which make writing attractive, as they do to the negative forces which repel. For example, there are often more negative comments than positive ones on papers; more attention is devoted to setting time and word limits than in considering the creative process; most papers are considered exercises for the eyes of the teacher so as to receive a grade rather than efforts to be shared with others. Fear alone does not produce good papers."[12]

For Daly, a journal may be that place where a student is rewarded for writing, with that reward removing the belief that any writing will bring punishment; such a reward may help to lower students' high apprehension. For Bloom, a journal may help a student feel easier, less fearful about writing, and get the anxiety under control. It may help break the stasis, the equal balance of attractions and repulsions that also makes students unable to write.

These first two justifications for using journals are psychological and sociological. They suggest that interferences between a person and a writing process are different from those we think of when we place students with standardized tests of skills or competencies. They suggest that students who "don't write well" aren't automatically preparatory, developmental, remedial (supply your own euphemism) as measured by the Test of Standard Written English; they aren't just lazy or stupid. Their grammatical and rhetorical hypercorrections, their oddnesses and improprieties in writing, may well come from anxiety. So these students may need to use writing for therapy and receive rewards for their efforts, if they are to be competent writers. That statement may unsettle teachers; it could imply that we should lower our standards or at least act as trained counselors or therapists. As to lowering our standards, I know of no teacher who wants students to write worse than they do now; as to acting as counselors, I have not found journals to be places for consistent expression of neuroses. Quite the opposite, I have found that the journals encourage students to gain health and freedom to use language inways they feel that they can't when they are required to use only the explicit formal style.

A third justification for journal writing is set forth by Sandra Schor and Judith Fishman in The Random House Guide to Basic Writing. In their chapter "Getting Started," they write briefly about how to write a journal and how to consult it when looking for subjects to write about. They advise students to "write about what got you that day, what you don't want to forget." "Selection," they say, "is the key to a good journal." They advise, further, "every few days reread your journal entries and underline passages that strike you as interesting, thoughts that you want to give

more time to. On a separate sheet of paper or in the back of your journal, list your underlined sentences. As an exercise, you may want to underline key passages in the sample journal entries on these pages."[13] This process is simply a prewriting stage in the composing process, or as Schor and Fishman call it, "the writing cycle." This humane approach makes journal entries directly related to the writing of essays. Anyone who has been skeptical so far that journal work couldn't be successfully merged with other kinds of writing in composition courses might take heart from these authors. As Schor and Fishman describe it, journal writing may feed directly into the composing of essays.

The fourth justification comes from James Britton, The Development of Writing Abilities (11-18), and Nancy Martin et al., Writing and Learning Across the Curriculum (11-16)--both of whom see composition more comprehensively in a framework of language and learning. Professor Britton has classified language use into three kinds--transactional, expressive, and poetic. Chronologically, the expressive mode comes first in acquiring spoken language and, likewise, first in writing. Britton describes this mode as a "kind of matrix from which differentiated forms of mature writing are developed."[14] That kind of writing is "close to the self," "verbalizing the writer's consciousness, displaying a close relation to the reader, submitting itself to the flow of ideas and feelings."[15] That mode is central to journal writing as I have been using the phrase. Here, the writer may feel free, as Nancy Martin says, "to jump from fact to speculation to anecdote to emotional outburst and none of it will be used negatively to judge the writer."[16] She calls the expressive mode BASIC, the seed bed for growth into other language modes.

For both Britton and Martin, those other modes are "transactional," or writing to get things done in the world, and "poetic," or writing with an especial attention to patterning, the creation of a verbal object of art.

Although students need to use expressive writing throughout their schooling, Britton has found that students in the English comprehensive schools write expressively less and less the closer they come to college age. In the seventh year of comprehensive schooling, Britton found that the kind of writing students may need most for their continuing language development, expressive writing, is least allowed in their assignments: 84% transactional, 7% poetic, and 4% expressive (5% was between modes).[17] We need to reflect here on the kinds of writing an American teacher assigns the closer her students get to college.

Besides classifying the kinds of writing done in the comprehensive schools, Britton also groups audiences within the school context: self, teacher, wider known audience, wider unknown audience, and additional categories. I want to look especially at one category, "teacher," within which there are four kinds of writer-audience relationships: child to trusted adult; pupil to teacher, general; pupil to teacher, particular; and pupil to examiner. These four categories cover a wide range of relationships. Bear in mind that I'm not focusing on the act of classification itself in Britton; rather, I'm looking towards the insights that a part of this classification will lead us to, so that I may apply them to journal writing.

Of the "child to trusted adult," Britton says, "a particular adult who wants to hear or read <u>anything</u> a child has to say may act as a strong incentive, a liberator";[18] furthermore, Britton observes that children

who haven't written often begin to do so simply because they now feel free to say what really matters to them. At the other end of the scale is the "pupil to examiner" relationship. Here no dialogue occurs; here writing is seen as a demonstration of what has been learned, an end point. Britton found, incidentally, that by far the greatest majority of writing was done here, not to further dialogue and learning but to see how well the students had done their homework.

In these two writer-audience relationships, Britton provides guidance for a teacher who wants to encourage journal writing. Since trust encourages writing, a teacher needs to accept anything a student writes as worthy of being read. A teacher may surely express enthusiasm and ask questions or point out differences in point of view to the student, but the teacher is not to be editor or examiner of the journal writer, for that would be to change the writer-reader relationship between student and teacher, requiring the student to write the kind of explicit prose excluded by the expressive mode. There is also guidance for a student, although it is only suggested and not explained here. Students may write what matters to them, write anything, and it will not be held against them. They will not be found wanting somehow, for journal writing is not like the writing of a test.

Here, a skeptical teacher might say, "So much for theory. Now, how does journal writing actually work?" It's imperfect like everything else we do. Journal writing is not a teacher's panacea. But the skeptical teacher's comment directs us towards some resistance, both in ourselves and in our students, we need to work our way through if we are to use journals in a writing course.

As teachers, we are likely to hesitate at four points. First, we may believe that there's too much variety in the amount, kinds, and quality of writing done in journals. Some students write only five or ten pages in a term, but others fifty or sixty pages. Some students write descriptions, short stories, and poems; others write what Britton has called "transactional" prose--that is, school English for a grade. Some students write easily, fluently in journals, but others write with difficulty, haltingly. Second, too many students write "garbage." That is, we teachers may believe that journals invite students to write trivially and contribute to the decline in their uses of language. Third, some students write much too personally about their own lives, intimate vignettes we might be embarrassed to read or confessions of things they have done and believe they shouldn't have. Fourth, because of the variety, the garbage, and the intimacy, the journals are hard to grade.

Students resist journals in two ways. They have a hard time defining their roles as writers in a journal, so they want to see it as transactional writing. Students then ask how long an entry should be, how many words or paragraphs it should contain, as if a journal entry were like an essay.[19] Feeling unsure of themselves and vulnerable to authority, students see journal writing as trivial and complain that they don't want to write what won't be marked and graded, as if those were the final measure of importance.

These hesitancies are all real. Yet rather than answer them directly, one by one, as if they need to be refuted to make journal writing worthwhile, I want to define a role for a teacher, one for a student, and one for a journal.

A teacher's role is ordinarily multi-faceted, but I want to highlight only two of those facets: a teacher as a person who defines through discussion in class and conference what a journal is, the beginning of the journey; and a teacher as a person who reads the journal, not as an editor or an evaluator, but as a trusted human being. In trying to define a journal as inclusively as possible, I call it a place where students can write what they have to say--there is no penalty for being provisional, exploring uncertainties, writing what's on their minds from day to day. I ask students to buy a hardbound notebook, one that looks and feels different from their other books; I ask them to write in it at least four times a week; and I ask them to consider it inclusive. If students wonder whether something should go in the journal or not, I say include it. They can write anything they want. If they have something to say that they believe is too personal for me, I say write it down somewhere else or write it in the journal and fold or tape the page closed. I won't read it. (Yes, I have been tempted to read those entries, but I haven't done it yet.) I only <u>discuss</u> the journal with students; I don't write out specific explicit instructions for using it, though I have sometimes done so in the past. The students have then seen the journal as exclusive and written less in it because of a finely honed definition.

Because I believe writing is a good thing--both therapeutic and educational--I also believe that we need to guard against the role of "teacher as examiner" when reading journals. A teacher here is a trusted adult who nurtures a student writer. A teacher has to be trusting here and project that trust, or a student will not write much in the journal (or for the rest of the course either). And not writing is a bad thing, therapeutically and educationally.

Students have a role, too. It is to be writers regularly and energetically, exploring what's on their minds. If a teacher has earned the trust of the students, then the students won't feel obligated to use the journal in order to prove they have done their homework. The writing will be evidence enough. Under these circumstances, students will have what Carl Rogers calls "psychological safety"--freedom to explore language, taking risks as they go and knowing whatever is written down won't be used against them, even if the phrasing sounds odd. Possible student roles here are to discover more about themselves by writing what is close to them and to articulate what needs to be said at the tip of the pen. In the relationship of "student to trusted teacher," students can liberate themselves in the act of writing.

Finally, there is a role for the journal itself. It becomes a crossing point of communication between student and teacher. The journal holds whatever a student wants to write; it also holds a teacher's honest questions and supportive comments. That role lets the journal nourish personal growth, help keep writing anxiety under control, feed into a student's composing process, and encourage the development of writing abilities. The journal will help the hand writing to stay connected with the person whose hand it is, and in that way, will keep the person in the process.

FOOTNOTES

[1]The Five Clocks (New York: Harcourt, Brace, & World, Inc.), p. 36.

[2]See Evelyn Wright, "School English and Social Order: Nineteenth Century Background to the Work of the Committee of Ten and its Conference on English," Diss. Northwestern, 1977, pp. 135-188.

[3]James Britton et al., The Development of Writing Abilities (11-18) (London: Macmillan, 1975), p. 90.

[4]"Dealing with Breakdowns in Communication--Interpersonal and Intergroup," On Becoming a Person (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1961), p. 330.

[5]Ibid.

[6]"Toward a Theory of Creativity," On Becoming a Person, pp. 357-8.

[7]Ira Progoff, At a Journal Workshop (New York: Dialogue House, 1975), p. 13.

[8]Ibid., p. 12

[9]John Daly and Michael D. Miller, "The Empirical Development of an Instrument to Measure Writing Apprehension," Research in the Teaching of English, 9 (Winter, 1975), pp. 243-49; John Daly, "Writing Apprehension and Writing Competency," unpubl. ms.; John Daly, "Writing Apprehension in the Classroom: Teacher Role Expectancies of the Apprehensive Writer," unpubl. ms.; John Daly and Wayne Shamo, "Academic Decisions as a Function of Writing Apprehension," in press; John Daly and Wayne Shamo, "Writing Apprehension and Occupational Choice," Journal of Occupational Psychology, 49 (1976), pp. 55-56.

[10]A letter from John Daly, 10 July 1978.

[11]Martin Bloom, "A Theory of Writing Behavior, with Special Emphasis on Writing Anxiety," to be published in Psychology of Composition, ed. Douglas Butturff (Akron, Ohio, 1980); see also Lynn Z. Bloom, "Writing Anxiety Workshopes," to be published in Psychology of Composition.

[12]Ibid.

[13]The Random House Guide to Basic Writing (New York: Random House, 1978), p. 21.

[14]The Development of Writing Abilities, p. 83.

[15]Ibid., p. 90

[16]Writing and Learning Across the Curriculum 11-16 (London: Ward Lock, 1976), p. 23.

[17]The Development of Writing Abilities, p. 165.

[18]Ibid., p. 68

[19]See Janis Forman, "The Work Habits of a Writer and our Teaching," Composition and Teaching, I (November, 1978), pp. 31-33.